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FM AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN
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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MTS/COPPOLAMG, INR/EAP/KERRK

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: BRUNEI'S NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTY (NDP): CHANGING WITH THE TIMES?

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) The only remaining political party in Brunei, the National Development Party (NDP), recently held its fourth party congress to elect NDP's new leadership for the 2009-2012 term. Yassin Affendi remains as President while Malai Hassan Othman (Note: A participant in a 2008 International Visitor Leadership Program. End Note) was elected as the Deputy President of NDP with no contest from the previous Deputy President Mahmud Morshidi. A majority of NDP members hoped Morshidi, who is the financial sponsor of NDP's operation and NDP's most active leader, would be elected as President while Affendi would step down. Morshidi did not contest Affendi's presidency and according to a party member, this is part of his plan to make party members realize they must learn to stand on their own to push for political development in Brunei. With this reshuffle, most NDP members 'feel lost', according to the new Deputy President Malai Hassan. NDP needs an infusion of new ideas and new leadership to give the party a greater relevance to the Brunei populace. End Summary

NDP CONGRESS: A PARTY IN SEARCH OF A CAUSE

2) (SBU) About 500 National Development Party (NDP) members attended the opening of NDP's fourth Annual General Congress. Embassy Deputy Chief Mission and Political Assistant were present, along other members of the diplomatic community. While there was a fairly robust turnout amongst the diplomatic corps, few Bruneian (GoB) government officials attended, even though many were invited. President Affendi, in his speech read by the then Deputy President Morshidi, reiterated that "NDP is not a national security threat and has no intention to overthrow His Majesty's government". NDP continues to swear its allegiance to the Sultan of Brunei and will support the Sultan by partnering with the government in realizing the nation's aspirations, particularly on MIB (Malay Islam Monarch) philosophy.

3) (SBU) President Affendi remains optimistic amidst Brunei's non-conducive environment for political growth. He believes only when the whole nation has a strong political will for a change can transformation begin in Brunei's political environment. He noted that it is apparent that Bruneians have no strong interest in political development. NDP does not blame the Sultan for the political stagnation, as the Sultan opened the door for political participation through the amended 2004 Constitution, the revival of the Legislative Council, and the approval of NDP's registration. NDP blames a group of "apparatchiks" in the GoB who imposed unnecessary warnings and restrictions on NDP's activities. NDP believes it is this group who has been instilling political phobia among the Bruneians, which is a major hindrance for political development.

UP CLOSE ASSESSMENT

14. (SBU) Deputy President Malai Hassan told Embassy Political Assistant that "NDP has no power", so the new strategy is to propagate the idea of NDP as the government's partner by contributing ideas from the grass-root level. Prior to the NDP Congress, Hassan said NDP was expecting Yassin Affendi to step down during the election and that Deputy President Mahmud Morshidi would be elected as President. He

also disclosed he believed NDP would undergo a major reshuffle. On June 24, after the election, Hassan remarked, "everyone feels lost", because NDP leans on Morshidi for direction as he is the iron man behind NDP's operation and the main financial sponsor. Most members joined NDP because of Morshidi but he felt NDP was relying on him too heavily for solutions. With the reshuffle, Morshidi hope it will educate members to start standing on their two feet. According to Malai Hassan, Morshidi will not challenge Affendi's presidency as long as Affendi is alive.

EXPANDING NDP'S BASE

15. (SBU) NDP Deputy President, Malai Hassan, participated in the International Visitor's Leadership Program (IVLP) "I-Vote 2008 Observing the Elections" in October 2008, when he was the then-NDP Spokesperson. As the new Deputy President, Malai Hassan plans to revamp NDP's structure by imparting his knowledge gained from the IVLP program. He would like to introduce a new election system. Malai Hassan is also on Facebook spreading NDP's cause with the hope of reaching a younger generation of Bruneians. He also has Hajah Saemah, Head of NDP's Women Bureau and a veteran journalist from Brunei's local Malay paper "Medi-Permata", assisting him in his program to expand NDP's reach in the digital and social media. Hassan has said he gained tremendous insights into grassroots campaigning and outreach, as well as the need to energize a youth base, while on his IVLP.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) Many NDP members feel passionately about the party but as noted by Malai Hassan, they are adrift and lost in terms of the party's purpose. NDP openly supports the Sultan and cites him as the inspiration for their party. Senior NDP officials know the party cannot

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and should not be a one man show but old habits of looking to one person to solve all problems is a hard habit to break in Brunei. Mahmud Morshidi and Malai Hassan hope NDP members learn this important lesson and allow the NDP to grow as a true political party. There remains an opportunity to assist the NDP with grassroots development, as appropriate within the larger framework of Brunei's current political system.

TODD